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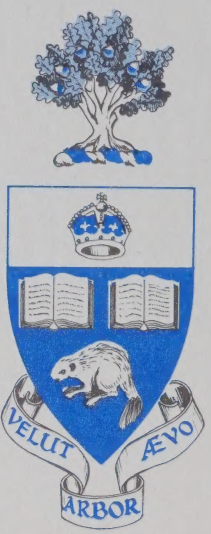

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COMMISSIONS, STATE AID AND STATE AGENCIES

BY

ASA WYNKOOP

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MANUALS OF LIBRARY ECONOMY

Types of Libraries

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III. "The State Library," J. I. Wyer.
IV. "The College and University Library," J. I. Wyer.
V. "Proprietary and Subscription Libraries," C. K. Bolton.
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XXV. "Pamphlets and Minor Library Material," J. I. Wyer and others.

Special Forms of Work

XXVII. "Commissions, State Aid and State Agencies," Asa Wynkoop.
XXVIII. "The Public Library and Public Schools." To be published.
XXIX. "Library Work with Children." Temporarily out of print.
XXX. "Library Work with the Blind," Mary C. Chamberlain.
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XXVII

COMMISSIONS, STATE AID, AND STATE AGENCIES

ASA WYNKOOP
New York State Library

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Introduction

With little if any conscious theorizing regarding the fundamental principles involved, leaders of the modern library movement have from the first assumed that library extension and improvement are matters of sufficient public concern to call for the exercise of governmental authority and functions. Indeed, one might say that this belief is involved in the very idea of the public library and in

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all the legislation that has made it possible; for the moment provision is made by law to establish a public library and to appropriate money from general taxation for its support, something of state sovereignty has been invoked and government has assumed a new function in the interest of social welfare. Every believer in the tax-supported public library believes that it is the proper business of government to compel the individual, whatever his private disposition or will in the matter, to contribute to its support. Justification for this belief is found in the fact that if the free library is an important factor in the general well-being of a community, then it is for the community as a *community*, and not merely as an association of individuals to provide this benefit; and as its advantages accrue to the social organism as a whole and not merely to its individual members, the burden of its support should be borne by the whole community.

Such being the theory on which the public library has made its claim and established a recognized legal status, the development of state library commissions and similar state agencies for promoting and improving public libraries has been nothing less than a logical necessity. For if it be wise and proper that the people of any village or city, by a majority vote, shall have the power to establish and maintain a library at the expense of all and for the benefit of all, it can hardly be less wise or proper that the people of the whole state should have the same power. If it is a sound political doctrine that the authority of government should be invoked in providing library privileges for the smaller social unit, that authority may certainly be invoked with at least equal justification in providing such facilities for the larger social unit. Once granted that the library is a factor of sufficient importance in social

well-being to entitle it to tax support, its right to a place in the policy and economy of the state government can hardly be questioned.

Causes for the Development of Commissions

But while the assumption by the state of authority and initiative in this matter has thus been a logical development of the public library idea, the moving cause in the development has not been the force of any mere logic but the recognition of some very obvious facts, among which the following have perhaps had the most weight:

1. The state spends vast sums of money to promote education through the schools. It is only through the diffusion of good books and libraries that this expenditure can secure its proper results. In the words of Dr. Richardson of Princeton, "To train a man for seven years to make shoes or machinery, and then turn him loose on the world without leather or iron, is just what the community does in education when after seven years of apprenticeship at books in order to learn how to add ideas, scholars are turned loose on the community without a public library" *(Library journal*, 1906, p. 111).

2. Leaving the question of providing library facilities entirely to local enterprise or initiative means that a great number of communities will have no library, just as at an earlier stage in our educational development the leaving of the question of providing public school facilities entirely to local initiative meant the utter absence of such facilities in many places. And further, it is just the places where local initiative is lacking that most need the public library.

3. The people of the whole state are vitally concerned as to the conditions that obtain in every part of the state.

An enlarged stock of moral ideas or ideals in any part of the commonwealth is an enrichment for the whole state. An impoverishment of such ideas in any community makes the whole state poorer. The people of every part of the commonwealth have to bear the expense of disease, degeneracy, pauperism and crime that may be propagated by conditions in some distant, obscure, and neglected community. If the library is a factor making for mental and moral health, then it is of concern to everybody in the state, and not merely to the people of a particular community, that there shall be a library in that community. The state, in propagating libraries, is looking after its own essential well-being.

4. The state as a whole, by its very constitution, can do many things for library development which are quite impossible for scattered communities. Obviously this is the case in the matter of suitable and helpful library laws, the most important form of aid the state can render. It is equally true of those activities which have to do with co-ordinating and correlating the work of scattered libraries whereby they may work together for the common good. So also in the matter of establishing standards and maintaining institutions for making such standards feasible, the state is the natural and obvious agent.

5. The agency of the state, where its activities are rightly directed, becomes a most effective factor in arousing and directing local interest and initiative. Instead of superseding or suppressing local responsibility, the state, through its commission or library department, has as its prime function and duty the awakening and quickening of local effort and responsibility.

History of State Aid To Libraries

But logical and obvious as these considerations may seem today, their acceptance as a state policy has been a matter of very recent years and in some states they are waiting still for official recognition.

If the assumption stated above is correct, that the idea of state agency in this matter is involved in the idea of tax support for free libraries, then we may find a beginning of this movement in the legislation of New York state in 1834 when provision was made for tax support for free libraries in school districts. Massachusetts followed with a similar law in 1837 and Connecticut in 1839. An important advance step was taken in 1838 when New York again led the movement by appropriating $55,000 from the state treasury as direct aid to district libraries, an act whose significance in modern library history can hardly be overestimated. It is to be borne in mind, however, that these acts, while making provision for a limited service to the general public, had in mind chiefly the interest of the schools and were a part rather of the general educational movement of the time than of a distinct library movement. The first state act to provide for the establishment and support by taxation of *city* and *town* libraries was that of New Hampshire in 1849. Massachusetts adopted a similar act in 1851, Maine in 1854, Vermont in 1855, Ohio and Rhode Island in 1867 and New York in 1872. Today the principle of tax support for public libraries has been all but universally adopted in the United States and in all other countries of advanced civilization.

The first state to make the definite and formal advance from the principle of tax support to that of state aid and

supervision, and to embody that principle in a distinct and permanent state agency, was Massachusetts, which in 1890 created by act of legislature a state board under the name of the Massachusetts free public library commission, whose sole duty and function it was to aid the establishment and development of free libraries throughout the state. The act carried with it an appropriation whereby the commission was enabled to give $100 worth of books to each new free library in the state which met proper conditions in its organization and service. It is worthy of note that the state which thus took the lead in this action still leads all others in its library development. New Hampshire, which led Massachusetts by two years in its provision for a local tax for libraries, was one year later in establishing its commission. Through the influence of its commission, however, it again took, in its library legislation, a position which was at the time and still is in advance of that taken by any other state, making it compulsory for every town to levy a library tax unless such tax is specifically rescinded by popular vote. New York was the third state to join in the movement, enacting in 1892 a most comprehensive library law by which the state library was made a central bureau for promoting, stimulating, aiding, and directing local liraries. In some respects this law, with its provisions for direct aid and supervision, is still in advance of any similar legislation in other states. In 1893 Connecticut and in 1894 Vermont established commissions similar to that of Massachussetts, providing both an organized propaganda for library extension and state funds to aid in starting new libraries. It is thus apparent that the movement began distinctly as a New England idea, four of the first five states to adopt it belonging to that section

of the Union. In 1895, however, the idea was taken up in a most vigorous and systematic way by Wisconsin and a free library commission was established in that state, which in its formal organization and activities has been generally taken as a model for the middle and western states. Ohio followed in 1896 with a law which centered the functions of the state commission in the state library, making it, as in New York, the agent of the state for general library extension and improvement. By 1897 the idea had begun to find acceptance in the South and was formally adopted by the legislature of Georgia in the creation of a library commission, but the act was evidently regarded as only a tentative proposition, as no money was made available to equip the commission for its work. The year 1899 was significant in the history of the movement, no less than eight states creating free library commissions, thus doubling the number of states to incorporate in their government the policy of library extension and supervision. These states were Maine, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota, Kansas, and Colorado, all putting the work into the hands of especially created commissions, though in two of these states, Maine and Michigan, some of the more important functions of state aid were definitely assigned to the state library. In 1900 Iowa joined in the movement; in 1901, Washington, Nebraska, Maryland, Idaho, and Delaware. In 1903 California put into operation a plan modeled very largely after that of New York, making the state library the center of all activities for library development in the state, a plan which has since been greatly modified by the establishment of the county library system. Colorado, not content with a single state agency to represent the library cause, created in 1903 a second state commission

whose function should be exclusively the maintenance of a system of traveling libraries. In 1905 Oregon came conspiciously to the front in this movement, creating a commission with unusual power and authority and enacting a library law which has often been cited as a model. In 1906 the legislature of Virginia conferred some of the powers of a library commission on the state library; in 1907 Alabama enlarged the function of the state department of archives and history, and Rhode Island that of the state board of education by creating standing committees for the promotion and supervision of free libraries. The same year independent free library commissions were established in North Dakota and Missouri, and in 1909 in Illinois, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Utah followed by the establishment of a state library-gymnasium commission, and Texas by a library and historical commission. In 1910 the Kentucky Library Commission was established, beginning active operations the following year. Since then the most interesting acts of State Legislation in this matter have been: the establishment of a Free Library Commission in South Dakota with broad powers in 1913; the transfer to the State Library of the functions of the existing library commissions in Oregon and Tennessee in that same year; the establishment of the Oklahoma Library Commission in 1919; the act of the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1919, transferring all the functions of the State Library Commission to a newly created library extension division of the State Library; and the consolidation of the Public Library Commission with the State Library in Illinois and Michigan in 1921.

To complete this brief historical sketch it is necessary also to include two of the more progressive provinces of

Canada where similar departments or commissions have been established and are in active operation. In the Province of Ontario, as early as 1868, governmental grants were made to libraries maintained by "Mechanics' Institutes". In 1880, the supervision of these libraries was formally vested in the Department of Education. In 1895 an act was passed making specific provision for "public libraries" and granting them annual state aid to a maximum of $200. In 1909 a general library law for the Province was passed, under which governmental aid, supervision and authority go beyond any thing thus far attempted in the United States. For many years Ontario was alone among the provinces of Canada in this matter, but in 1919 British Columbia adopted a similar policy of governmental aid and supervision, creating a public library commission with powers analogous to those of the leading states of the United States.

It is thus seen that in the brief space of 32 years, 38 states representing 92 per cent of the population of the United States, together with two provinces of Canada, have adopted both the principles of state aid and supervision for public libraries and created appropriate state agencies for carrying on that work, giving the library a definite place in the economy of government as "an integral part of the system of public education."

In the application of the principle, however, there is the widest possible divergency among the several states. In some the principle receives a recognition which is hardly more than formal and complimentary, in others it is put into operation with very inadequate facilities, while in others it is developed and carried out to its logical conclusions with a thoroughness and detail hardly exceeded by the department of schools.

Functions of Library Commissions

The scope of this article forbids any detailed description of what the different states are doing or how their library departments are organized. For such details readers are referred to the *Handbook* of the League of Library Commissions, which has recently been brought up to date. The aim here is to take a general survey of the whole field of commission work and to indicate in the broadest way the various activities which the state has assumed in this connection. From such a survey it may be seen that the state, through its library department, has assumed at least the following ten general functions:

1. *The establishing of local libraries.*—In the performance of this function the commission is called upon to maintain a great variety of activities. It must first make a careful study of the library law of the state, outline and urge amendments where needed, and put such provisions of the law as are pertinent and vital in such form and language as will be easily understood and give it the widest possible publicity. It must make a careful survey of the field to be covered and have all the facts bearing on its particular problem carefully tabulated and easily available. By correspondence, circulars, personal visits it stimulates, initiates, organizes, or assists local movements for a new library. It sends its organizers to outline plans for a library campaign, to hold conferences with public officials, to organize conferences and public gatherings, and to set forth in informal or formal addresses the best ideas, ideals, and methods of the modern library movement. In a few states it furnishes an additional incentive by offering to the community as a direct grant from the state treasury an initial sum for new books.

It assures the new enterprise, fearful of its ability to stand alone, the continuance of aid and support, either by a steady supply of traveling libraries, by grants from the state treasury, or by personal service and attention, or by all of such forms of aid. Where its work is fully developed, it maintains free for circulation a library bulletin whereby stimulating and informing library literature shall be regularly and systematically distributed among those whose influence or interest in the matter is particularly desired. And finally, it maintains a general headquarters of information available for everyone whose thoughts or interests may be directed to the question of starting, assisting, or endowing a library. In its work for the establishment of libraries, the commission occupies a position analogous to that of a church extension board or a board of home missions and thus far has shown a notable degree of the spirit and zeal which such boards are supposed to possess.

2. *Aiding and improving local libraries.*—The first thought regarding the commission is often limited to its function as an agency of library extension, but this is only the beginning of its real and permanent work, and a service which would perhaps be of doubtful value if its work ended there. In the great majority of cases, where the commission's service is needed at all, it is needed as a continuous help and stimulus to the local enterprise, and most of the more developed commissions today are devoting a great part of their resources and efforts to this service. In one state or another the following direct forms of assistance and supervision are provided by the state: *(a)* The formulation and establishment of library standards on the basis of which state recognition and certain forms of aid are to be given; *(b)* annual grants for ap-

proved books; *(c)* the personal services of an expert library organizer to introduce best methods and tools; *(d)* printed aids in book selection and the personal help of the commission to this same end where desired; *(e)* the sending to local libraries of individual books when needed, collections of books for extended periods, or collections of the best printed library aids; *(f)* the providing of plans and suggestions for new library buildings or for remodeling old ones; *(g)* the providing of aid and advantages in book-buying by securing favorable terms and suitable bindings; *(h)* aids in the matter of selecting, securing, and utilizing various kinds of free materials, such as government, state, institutional, and corporation publications; *(i)* the rendering of direct aid in securing better support by taxation or otherwise; *(j)* services in the matter of securing proper librarian; *(k)* by argument, example, persuasion, and the presentation of high ideals, aid in transforming old subscription libraries into free public libraries; *(l)* the giving of special attention to dead or moribund libraries, ascertaining the cause of their decline and weakness, and applying all possible remedies within its resource.

3. *Promoting helpful co-operation between libraries.*— Libraries often fail of their true efficiency, not because of any specific defects in their individual work or organization but because they are working in isolation from others, and are wasting in unnecessary duplication, resources and energy which should be available for other ends. It is for the central state agency, which is able to see things as a whole, to point out where unnecessary duplication is causing waste and inefficiency, to provide the appropriate remedy, and to bring about proper co-ordination and co-operation. In this field the commissions

have as yet hardly begun to realize their full possibilities, but they have accomplished much and have proposed programs and plans for vastly more. Among the things definitely accomplished in one or more states are: *(a)* the establishment of a central periodical exchange; (*b*) the interchangeable use by different libraries of each other's lists, bibliographies, picture bulletins, etc.; (*c*) the maintenance of local library institutes or round tables for regular interchange of ideas and experiences; (*d*) the maintenance of some degree of unity and co-operation between the public library system and that of the school library; (*e*) the establishment of county library systems. Plans for co-operation which have been put on paper and recommended but which have not yet been put into operation to any important extent are: co-operative and centralized system of book-buying; the maintenance of a general book exchange; a system of specialization between neighboring libraries whereby each shall develop special collections to be available for all through a system of inter-library loans and a common catalog; and the joint employment by groups of libraries of a general superintendent for the whole group. The promotion of each of these objects is easily within the proper scope and power of the commissions, and they will doubtless receive attention with the further development of the work.

4. *Raising the standard and quality of library service.*— One of the most vital and influential factors in the present library movement is the idea on which it has from the first placed supreme emphasis, that for a good library there must be a trained and efficient librarian, that to build up an effective library system either for a single community or for a state requires first of all a trained and disciplined force to operate such a system. Hence it

has been one of the first tasks of the state commissions to provide ways and means for securing such service. The following are methods now in operation by which various commissions are solving this problem: (*a*) by regular schools of library service, analogous in design and course of teaching to the state normal schools for teachers; (*b*) by means of summer schools where brief elementary courses in library economy are given to librarians whose duties are simple and whose libraries are small; (*c*) where no school is maintained by the commission, provision is made by one state at least (Massachusetts) to pay part of expenses of summer school course for a limited number of promising librarians; (*d*) by providing a minimum standard of qualification for service in public libraries. Legislation looking to the establishment of such standards in certain kinds or grades of libraries has recently been enacted in California, Illinois, Ohio, New York, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin; (*e*) by stimulating and aiding the development of local library clubs and the growth of all library associations, thus promoting the development of a professional spirit among library workers; (*f*) by individual instruction and training of local workers by expert organizers whose extended visits and organizing work have as their main end this training and instruction; (*g*) by keeping constantly to the front in all spoken or printed utterances high ideals for library service, and pressing the matter of better salaries for such service in all proper and dignified ways.

5. *Providing aid to schools and to school libraries.*— The relation of the library department of the state to its school department is one on which there appears as yet to be no settled agreement, and it varies greatly in differ-

ent states. In some, the library department is a division of and subordinate to the school department, in others the two departments are co-ordinate; in still others, divisions of work which are quite generally recognized as belonging clearly to the department of education have been definitely placed under the supervision of the state library commission. But whatever the formal relation, the schools are uniformly recognized by the commissions as an important part of the public and as entitled to such service from them as they are peculiarly fitted to render. In this relation the following are the more important lines of commission work: (*a*) supplying the schools with traveling libraries; (*b*) assisting the schools in the selection, classification, and use of books by means of graded, classified, and cataloged lists; (*c*) providing a central reference collection and information bureau for the use of the schools; (*d*) providing outlines, references, and traveling collections of material for use in school debates; (*e*) promoting and assisting library training in normal schools for teachers and teacher librarians; (*f*) establishing and maintaining standards of qualification for heads of school libraries; (*g*) distributing library aids and good library literature to the schools; (*h*) promoting systematic training of school children in the use of books and libraries.

6. *Aid to libraries in state charitable, penal, and reformatory institutions.*—For several years the commissions were so absorbed in other activities that little attention was given to the needs and claims of that unfortunate part of the population which, for its own or for the public good, has been shut away from the common life of the community and confined in various state institutions. Lately, however, there has been a marked awakening of interest in this phase of library work in all parts of the country,

and some notable advances have been made in the equipment, organization, and administration of institutional libraries through the initiative and supervision of state library commissions. In some states the movement instituted by the commissions for improved conditions in these libraries has gone so far as to bring about the appointment of a trained library supervisor to have general charge and direction of all the institutional libraries of the state. In some others the commission has designated one of its own staff to give his or her entire attention to this field. The general attitude and aim of the commissions in this matter may be seen in a circular recently sent by the commission of one of the central states to all the institutions within its bounds, in which the following service to each is offered: the providing regularly, without cost, of the A.L.A. *Booklist;* the sending on request of lists of approved books on topics of special interest or lists of stories for reading aloud; the giving of advice on editions and binding or on mending and repair of books; assistance in planning arrangement of rooms, furniture, or shelving; assistance in classifying or cataloging the library; the teaching of the librarian, if untrained, how to carry on the work in the most simple and effective way; the giving of help and advice, if desired, by a personal visit of the secretary of the commission.

7. *Providing library facilities where no local library exists or can be maintained.*—With the facilities, resources, and liberal provisions of law now to be found in most of the states having commissions, there is no reason, save ignorance or indifference, why even the smallest and poorest groups of the population should not enjoy the privilege of good books. For such groups the state commissions or library departments are providing in the following ways:

(a) by traveling libraries sent direct from the commission or state library, on petition of a certain number of taxpayers and on the condition that the books are to be entirely free to all in the community. A small fee is usually charged to cover cost of transportation, but in one or two states a limited number of books are supplied without any fee whatever; *(b)* by encouraging and aiding the establishment of town and county systems whereby a strong central library shall be free to the whole town or county, maintaining deposit stations or branches wherever there is any considerable group of readers; *(c)* by bringing about mutual agreements and contracts between communities or districts devoid of libraries with near-by village or city library systems whereby the privileges of the latter shall be extended to the former on consideration of a small payment; *(d)* by what is known as the system of "house libraries" or "home libraries" whereby small collections of books are sent for three months direct to the homes of readers, whose needs, responsibility, and serious purpose are duly authenticated and where a small fee is paid for transportation; *(e)* by providing, where they have the necessary authority, and encouraging in other cases, liberal rules in the administration of school libraries whereby all the people of the school district shall have such free use of those libraries as is consistent with the prior claims of the schools.

8. *Selecting and distributing public documents.*—Much still remains to be done before the commissions fulfil the measure of service which logically belongs to them in selecting and evaluating state and United States government documents and supplying them to local scattered libraries. For such a service there are needed in most states decided changes in the laws and enlarged appropriations and equip-

ment for the commissions; but even under present limitations they are doing something to aid in this difficult matter. Thus in their bulletins, their field work, their summer schools, institutes, and other meetings, they call continuous attention to the great body of valuable material that is available at little or no expense to libraries in state and federal publications. They have had prepared and have widely distributed among libraries printed aids for the selection and use of such material. In some states they directly distribute, in all they recommend the monthly lists issued at Washington of federal and state publications. Occasionally, lists of valuable material on special subjects of interest, published by governmental agencies and supplied free or at a nominal cost to libraries, are compiled by one commission and used for free distribution by all the others. In one state a quarterly annotated list of recent documents issued by that state, of special value to the small library, is regularly prepared by an expert and given to libraries through the quarterly library bulletin. In some of the states the commission, in a larger number the state library, has been made the general headquarters where all or a majority of the state publications may be secured by local libraries. A further development in this direction which has been suggested and urged and which may be worked out in the near future is the establishment of a central clearing-house or exchange for all available and desirable federal, state, municipal, institutional, and corporate publications.

9. *Library for the blind.*—In three states, Alabama, California, and New York, a distinct library for the blind, supplied with books printed in raised letters, has been established as a department of the state library or commission, and an active propaganda is maintained for the

free circulation and use of these books. In other states the commission is the active agent through which other important institutional or governmental libraries for the blind are brought to the attention and service of the blind people of the state.

10. *Legislative reference work.*—No department of library work has excited more interest or received more commendation in recent years than that commonly known as legislative reference work. This is partly due to a clear recognition of the importance and advantage to the states of the aid thus rendered toward wise legislation, and partly to the fact that this work lies so close to the body which makes the appropriations. The work in its theory and purpose is as old as parliamentary government. It is the work for which governmental and state libraries were primarily founded. The thing that is new or modern and that has made the work itself assume the proportion of a new movement is simply the application of modern advanced library ideas and methods to this particular field, the last to be thus developed. Logically then the work belongs rather to the state library, using that term in its older and narrower sense, than to the public library commission or department of free libraries; but in many states, particularly those establishing library commissions since the idea of legislative reference has been so popular and those in which the commissions have been noted for their initiative and efficiency, the legislatures have definitely put this work in charge of the commissions. The determining factor in the arrangement has evidently been the question of expediency or efficiency rather than of logical consistency. At any rate, legislative reference has now become a definite and important function, in the

minds of some the most important function of the state library commissions.

What State Agencies Have Accomplished For Library Extension

It would be assuming altogether too much to attribute to state library commissions or other central agencies for library extension the full credit, or perhaps the greater credit, for the library expansion and development that have taken place in the different states since such agencies were established. The present is distinctively a library age and the public library idea is making its way in all parts of the world regardless of state and governmental agencies. Every advance in general education, in science, in liberal ideas, in public intelligence and well being is an aid to library development, and the library commissions themselves are products of these social forces. But the briefest possible survey of the history and work of the commissions in different states is sufficient to demonstrate beyond question their direct and positive contribution toward library extension during the last thirty years. Thus in Massachusetts, when the free public library commission was established in 1890, there were 105 towns without free library privileges. After ten years of work by the commission there were but seven towns without such privileges and today there is a free library for the people of every one of its 352 towns. In New York, when the present system of state aid and supervision was put into effect, there were in the state, including school libraries free for circulation, 238 free libraries, having a total of 850,000 volumes and an annual circulation of 2,293,000 volumes. Five years later there were 408 such libraries with a total stock of 1,755,000 volumes and a cir-

culation of 6,439,000—an increase of 80 per cent in the number of libraries, 100 per cent increase in the stock of books, and 200 per cent increase in the circulation. In five years, more was done under the new act for the development of free libraries than in the whole previous history of the state. The Connecticut commission was established in 1893. The state had at that time 43 free libraries. After five years of commission work the number had grown to 84. In Vermont the commission was established in 1894, there being at that time 41 free libraries in the state. By 1899 the number had increased to 124, a threefold multiplication of free library centers during five years of commission activity. Wisconsin established its library commission in 1895 when there were 33 free libraries in operation in the state. Four years later the number had increased to 77, and today there are 210 such libraries in operation, nearly seven times as many as at the time the commission was created. In Ohio during the first twelve years of commission work the number of free libraries having 5,000 volumes or over increased from 22 to 56. In New Jersey there was an increase from 47 to 99 in free libraries during the first five years of the commission and an increase from 1,604,644 to 5,889,000 in free library circulation during this period. In Indiana there were at the time the commission was created 57 free libraries. Five years later there were in operation 91 free libraries. During this period the number of library buildings in the state increased from 6 to 61. Minnesota reported in 1899, when its library commission was established, 34 public libraries and 5 library buildings. In 1904 its report showed 70 public libraries and 34 library buildings, and today it has 150 public libraries and 90 library buildings. Iowa, whose library

commission began work in 1900, has during the twenty-two years of its commission's work increased the number of its public libraries from 41 to 139 and its public library buildings from 5 to 120. In Nebraska, where a state library commission was established in 1901, free libraries increased in number during the first five years of commission work from 26 to 55, and now number 159.

These particular states are cited, merely because statistics bearing on just these points are easily available, and not because results in them have been at all exceptional.

It should further be noted that of the 8,302 libraries of 1,000 volumes or more in the United States, reported by the U. S. Bureau of Education in 1915, 8,017 are in the 38 states which have state agencies for library development and only 285 are in the other 10 states. The states having no library commissions, while having 9,173,668 population, or more than nine per cent of that of the whole country, have less than three and a half per cent of the libraries. Massachusetts alone, with a population less than half that of the states without library commissions, has twice as many libraries as all these ten states combined.

For the states having library commissions, there is an average of one library for each 12,041 of population; for the states having no commissions, there is an average of one library for each 35,697 of population.

In the face of such facts there is hardly need of stating the conclusion that state initiative and the various forms of aid represented in the work of the commissions have been a most influential factor in bringing about present library conditions in the United States. Where no direct state agency has been established for this work, the library is still in a very primitive state of development.

Limitations and Possible Errors in Commission Work

The organized central agency for a library propaganda has, however, certain natural limits and dangers, a disregard for which has sometimes minimized if it has not neutralized some of the benefits of the work. In the first place, there is danger of disregarding the particular conditions and special needs to be met in the different states. Each state has an educational, social, intellectual, and economic history of its own, and in each the central library department and the organization of its activities should obviously be an outgrowth of this history. A state with long traditions of culture, and where local initiative and private benefactions have already provided a liberal supply of library facilities, naturally calls for a very different kind and degree of state aid from one where everything is new, plastic and unformed. So a population which is stationary or declining in numbers or wealth and from which the more virile elements are constantly drawn by the greater opportunities of growing cities or new states, presents a problem totally different from that of a population rapidly increasing in numbers and wealth and possessing the hope, vigor, and initiative natural to such communities.

Then there is the possibility, always inherent in any state agency, of producing artificial results, suppressing local initiative, and bringing about a mechanical uniformity. It would be no great achievement for the state to provide or establish local libraries. If this were its sole object in this matter, it could by its own authority and resources quickly provide that every hamlet within its bounds should have a library. All that is needed for this is a compulsory law or a sufficient state bounty; but no state would be proud of results thus attained. The prob-

lem of the state library commission or department is not merely library development, but such development with the least possible effort, initiative, or bounty on the part of the state and the greatest possible effort, initiative, or bounty by the individual community. The state can easily do too much—it is in constant danger of doing too much, both in the stimulus and direct aid it offers for the establishment of local libraries and the bounty and regulation it supplies to libraries already established. The question what not to do is quite as important as the question what to do.

And this suggests the further consideration that the proper work of state agencies in the matter of library extension is always conditioned by their own success. A main object of this centralized work is to make the work unnecessary, and to continue it beyond that limit is to work injury rather than benefit. If the commission is truly successful in establishing and developing local libraries, it will gradually see these libraries assuming more and more responsibility, not only for their own work and development but for their neighboring communities; and thus whole sections of the state which began their library history by complete dependence on state aid and initiative are brought one by one to the attainment of a local autonomy and independence. From every state examples of such progress may be cited, and it is in just such developments that commission workers may find the best justification for their work.

It is in recognition of this that they are now bending their efforts so generally and so largely to the movement which has lately assumed such large proportions in several states, for township and county library systems. For every extension by a local library, of its field or activity, there

is a corresponding release of responsibility, resource, and effort, on the part of the state, and the ideal of library extension will be attained whe the whole field is thus covered and provided with proper library facilities by local effort.

The most striking example of this process of transferring from the state to its local divisions the responsibility for library extension is now seen in California, which only a few years ago was noted for its centralized activities. With the adoption of its system of county libraries and the rapid expansion of that system, the state has largely ceased its direct effort in behalf of local communities or libraries and is devoting its main efforts to promoting and assisting the county library systems. Even its traveling library department, which once was famous as the only one in the country to be supplied to all communities directly and entirely at state expense, is now being used almost entirely in supplementing the county library in its work. County responsibility for library extension has thus been substituted, in theory at least, for state responsibility, and the state department of free libraries is bending its main energy to making this theory a fact.

What then of the future of the state library commissions? Are they to be regarded as mere temporary makeshifts whose very success is to render them superfluous?? So it has sometimes been asserted, but this assumption ignores all but a single function of commissions, that of territorial expansion of library facilities. The time may come when the state will no longer need to promote new libraries or to send its traveling libraries to districts that have no libraries of their own; but as will be seen by referring to the outline already given of the normal functions of a library commission, the matter of mere territorial expansion is but one of its many functions and perhaps

not the most important. To whatever degree of development the individual libraries of a state may attain, there will always be need of a central agency to bring and to hold these libraries into a working system, to serve as headquarters for information and suggestion, to prevent unnecessary duplication, to maintain standards and professional schools where such standards may be realized, and in general to provide such co-ordination and co-operation as are ever needed for the best economy and efficiency. And even in the matter of library extension, success in covering the whole field of a state will only give another direction and emphasis to the work, it will not bring it to an end; for as Mr. Dudgeon of Wisconsin has so effectively pointed out, there is an intensive as well as an extensive work to be done in library extension, and to this there is no limit, save in the resources of the commission.

A word remains to be said as to the mutual relations which these various agencies of the state have established among themselves and the co-operative work they have undertaken. The separate commissions had not gone far in their work for their several states before they found that they had many common needs and problems and that each could profit greatly from the ideas and labors of the others. For each commission to work alone was seen to be as wasteful of money and effort and as illogical as for individual libraries to ignore the work of others. The advantages of co-operation were especially apparent in the matter of published library helps, selection of books, the issue of helpful and stimulating library literature and the establishment of commissions in states not having them. Consideration of these advantages led the neighboring commissions of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota, as early as 1901, to a tentative plan of co-operation in the issue of their publi-

cations. The working of the plan proved so satisfactory and the advantage of an extension of it to include all the commissions became so apparent that in 1904, at the World's Fair Conference of the American Library Asociation at St. Louis, a special meeting was held of representatives of all the library commissions in attendance at that conference, at which a resolution was unanimously adopted to form a national organization to be known as the League of Library Commissions, the specific objects of which should be "to promote by co-operation such library interests as are within the province of library supervision by the state." Such an organization was immediately effected, a constitution and by-laws adopted, and the commissions or library departments of ten states were enrolled in membership. Since that date 21 other state commissions have formally joined the League, and it now represents practically all of the states in which commission work has reached any advanced degree of development. It is affiliated with the American Library Association and holds meetings in connection with the meetings of that body. The League has a large number of helpful and widely used publications to its credit, many of which now appear under the imprint of the American Library Association. Its influence in promoting harmony, economy, and efficiency among the commissions has been most beneficial and effective. In its organization and design it is much like the recently formed council or assembly of state governors, having no legal status or authority, but accomplishing its objects by the weight of its suggestions or recommendations.

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